

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

October 2007

The pension rights of all firefighters are under threat as a result of government guidance on ill-health retirements. *Firefighter* spoke to one member denied a job and pension as a result

See page 12

NO JOB NO PENSION NO MONEY



wholetime firefighter, who took up a second contract as a retained firefighter on or after 6th April 2006 and received a compensation award under section 1(1)(b) of the Compensation for Ill-Health Retirement Act 2005. It is important to note that payments made by the FRA to a firefighter under section 1(1)(b) of the Compensation for Ill-Health Retirement Act 2005 will not affect their pension rights (see paragraph 4.2 below).

2.3 It has been brought to our attention that some FRAs have advised their firefighters that if they were to suffer adverse financial effects by receiving less than wholetime compensatory awards as result of suffering a qualifying injury under their second contract then the FRA would make good any shortfall. It is our view that such payments would be ultra vires.

3. Secondary duties

3.1 FRAs should also be aware of the implications for compensatory awards

Secondary contracts

Don't give up your rights Page 15



Viva la revolución!

Firefighters benefit from progressive change in Venezuela Page 10

What does a forensic scientist do?

Sarah Griffith on fire investigation Page 16



This pensions robbery is a complete and utter disgrace



You will read in this month's magazine about three members at the sharp end of the government's so-called pension 'reform'.

The three members highlighted in the article have had their pension stopped by their former employer. They are now placed in the position of being without a job and without a pension – essentially cast aside by the fire and rescue service to which they gave their working lives. It is hard to find the words to express sufficient anger at this situation. I know that FBU members and their families reading the article will be as shocked and angered as I have been over recent weeks.

The three members currently in this position are simply the first. We undoubtedly face the prospect of many, many more joining them as the Communities and Local Government Department attempts to effectively end any form of ill-health retirement from the service.

The logic behind this case is bizarre, worthy of Alice in Wonderland or something from the works of Kafka. Our members are now to be told: "You are not fit to perform your full duties as a firefighter. You could perform some other job with associated duties if such a post existed. However, no such job does exist. That is not our problem it is yours. We cannot employ you and nor can we give you a pension."

The truth is that firefighters have paid a higher contribution to their pension than is paid in most other pension schemes. This higher contribution reflects the fact that retirement has been earlier than for others and that the scheme allowed for ill-health retirements because of the physical demands of work in the fire service.

The FBU takes its obligations to members seriously. We will stand by these members and any others similarly affected.

Now that understanding is being ripped up and years of higher contributions are to be stolen from our members. We cannot and will not stand by and allow this to happen.

This article, alongside the recent circular to members on the subject, marks the *start* of our campaign on this issue.

We shall raise this matter in parliament, with chief officers, with fire authorities and with the public. We shall explore and utilise every legal avenue. We shall expose this injustice for all to see – and I ask for your support in doing so.

No justice – no peace

For much of the past two years, along with other FBU officials, I have worked hard to try to improve industrial relations in our service. Nobody wants to see endless conflict and industrial action in such an essential service. I believe that the vast majority of FBU members would agree that industrial peace is better than industrial conflict.

But you cannot have peace without justice and this attack on pension rights is a disgraceful injustice. It must be challenged. We have no option.

We often hear that the fire service is like a family. I cannot imagine any family that would treat one of its own in this contemptible way. This issue poses a challenge to all within the service, including those in senior positions as chief officers or politicians. I will be watching with interest how others respond.

We can either allow people to be treated in this way or we can do what is right – stand up and fight back. The FBU takes its obligations to members seriously.

We will stand by these members and any others similarly affected. It is the right thing to do.

Matt Wrack





YOUR LETTERS

FRS staff made me immensely proud

The recent flooding seen in South Yorkshire was unprecedented. Whilst, regrettably, lives have been lost and many residents left temporarily homeless, it is a tribute to the emergency services working in close collaboration that we have not lost more lives.

I am immensely proud to be Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority at a time when the staff of the fire and rescue service nationally have shown, yet again, their dedication, commitment and bravery in carrying out their duties.

I should like to take this opportunity, through the FBU, to thank all colleagues in the 30-plus brigades for their help in supporting our fire crews and in protecting the lives and property of the communities in South Yorkshire.

Councillor Jim Andrews
South Yorkshire
Fire and Rescue Authority

Firefighters worked for hours non-stop during the recent floods. They pay a higher contribution to their pension than in most other pension schemes to reflect that retirement has been earlier than for others and that the scheme allowed for ill-health retirements because of the physical demands of work in the fire service

→ *Firefighter* welcomes your letters relating to articles published in the magazine. We do not publish letters where an email address only is supplied. Please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

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WIN
A 15-inch
LCD TV
see p22

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll be the owner of a Philips 15-inch HD-ready LCD television



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In brief



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The Penhallow Hotel on 18 August

Councillors spurn FBU cuts pleas

CORNWALL

The Union has condemned Cornwall County Council's refusal to reverse its decision to downgrade Falmouth and Camborne fire stations in the wake of the fire at the Penhallow Hotel, Newquay, on 18 August. The FBU's campaign continues to gather pace with local politicians, media and the community rallying behind it.

In meetings on 21 August with Cornwall County Council leader David Whalley and fellow councillor Ken Yeo, executive

member for public protection, the Union called on the county council to drop the cuts proposals.

The councillors refused, saying instead that they wished to await the outcome of a detailed investigation into events at Newquay. The proposals were to be considered by the full council on October 9.

The FBU also called for the shortfall in fulltime firefighters, currently standing at 17, to be addressed as a matter of the utmost urgency.

This equates to almost 1 in 10 of the

wholetime establishment in Cornwall.

The FBU also urged the councillors to increase retained firefighter numbers in Cornwall in line with a review that has been gathering dust on a council shelf for three years.

Both requests were refused.

As *Firefighter* went to press, a local newspaper, *The West Briton*, was organising a march, backed by the FBU, to save 24-hour fire cover in Cornwall. Taking place on 29 September, it was to go between Falmouth and Camborne fire stations.

Union notches up solid growth in RDS members

BUILDING THE UNION

Union membership, particularly among firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS) is growing solidly in a number of brigades.

In North Wales RDS membership has topped 800, a rise of 300 in ten years, and the highest proportion of total RDS establishment in the country. This followed a concerted effort by local officials to visit retained stations to highlight the benefits of membership and encourage the maximum involvement of RDS members in the Union's democratic decision-making processes, said brigade official John Purser.

"We take retained issues as seriously as those affecting all our other members,

be they wholetime firefighters, officers or emergency fire control staff," he said.

Part of the success story are "open" brigade committee meetings at which all members are invited to join in discussions.

In North Yorkshire, the Union has seen over 50 RDS firefighters join in recent months thanks to an ongoing tour by brigade membership secretary Brian Barratt, who has been explaining why it's good to be in the FBU.

Said Crew Manager Stephen Tyler of Pickering: "We had one person at the station who was an FBU member, so we took advice from him on local issues. But after a presentation on the benefits of being an FBU member, we all joined as we hadn't realised how many benefits there are.



Membership at Pickering fire station in North Yorkshire went from one firefighter to 100 per cent after a presentation by brigade secretary Brian Barratt convinced RDS firefighters of the many benefits of joining



South West Regional Official John Drake (left) and his daughter Ellie joined Billy Bragg at Shepton Mallet prison in Somerset to deliver the first batch of equipment purchased with the donations raised at the Glastonbury Festival by Jail Guitar Doors, an initiative set up by the singer to provide musical equipment for prisoners. The FBU matched funds donated by the audience at Glastonbury's Left Field arena.

BERKSHIRE

Authority gets plan to keep 24-hour cover for Windsor

The Union was due to take zero-cost proposals to maintain 24-hour cover at Windsor fire station to the Berkshire Fire Authority Executive on 24 September as *Firefighter* went to press.

The proposals received a "positive" response from Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service senior managers earlier in the month, said Eddie Cardoso, FBU brigade secretary in Berkshire. If endorsed by the executive, the proposals will be taken to the full Fire Authority meeting in Maidenhead on 10 October for approval. They would allow the service to achieve day cover at Wokingham fire station without reducing Windsor's 24-hour cover.

Mick Rowley, Windsor FBU rep said: "If approved by the fire authority, the firefighters in Windsor and the whole of Berkshire would welcome this positive development, however, the FBU will continue to campaign to maintain 24-hour fire cover in Windsor in the long term."

See www.windsorfirestation.co.uk

Sounding off!

ALLAN GUEST

Chair, Officers National Committee

Newquay, the RRO and enforcement

Following the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) in October 2006, staff at the Communities and Local Government Department working on the final draft of an Enforcers Guide for the RRO must have thought that the first anniversary of its introduction would pass without comment.

But not after the Penhallow Hotel disaster in Newquay on 18 August which resulted in the deaths of three people. Then a fatal fire at the Manor Hotel in Blackpool took another life on September 17.

The spotlight has fallen on the RRO and how it is being enforced. So, is there a



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

Fire crews at work after the fatal hotel fire in Blackpool last month

'problem' with the RRO. And are fire authorities enforcing it as envisaged when the legislation was drafted?

The RRO was the final manifestation of the FBU's Fire Safety Bill, first proposed in 1992. It replaced more than 100 pieces of fire safety legislation.

As the Union pointed out when the Order was proposed, its effectiveness relies almost entirely on its proper and ongoing enforcement by fire and rescue authorities.

So are they doing this?

The answer is that to enforce the RRO fire and rescue authorities need competent people to carry out the work. They need to have the skills, experience and knowledge to deal with the challenges that the RRO has given them and there need to be enough of them.

We have been aware for some time that this is an area of concern to our members serving in fire safety departments. They tell us that, in some authorities, legislative fire safety enforcement is receiving a low priority and suffering significant resource reductions.

These concerns are being investigated and, where and when necessary, the FBU will challenge fire and rescue authorities that, in our view, are failing to properly resource legislative fire safety enforcement.



Matt Wrack warned TUC delegates of the dangers of tea lights

Congress backs FBU campaign for public and firefighter safety

TUC Congress in Brighton on 10–13 September backed the Union's proposal for a campaign to improve the safety of the public and of firefighters. The FBU motion focused on the safety of the public in high-rise buildings and of firefighters responding to incidents in them. It also highlighted the dangers of tea light candles.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack paid homage to Mike Miller and Jeff Wornham, firefighters from Stevenage fire station Blue Watch, who died in the Harrow Court fire and to the heroism they showed trying to save the life of a resident, Nathalie Close.

He said that following the inquest into their deaths and discussions with their families it was agreed that the "best tribute" to them would be to ensure that the lessons of the tragedy were learned.

The FBU's motion 54, "Fires in high-rise dwellings" called for fire services and other public authorities to work with trade unions and tenants' and residents' groups to ensure that:

- there is public awareness of the risks of using tea lights without appropriate holders;
- firefighters are provided with adequate opportunities for familiarisation visits to all high-rise buildings;
- firefighters are provided with suitable realistic training for incidents in such premises;
- systems are established to allow the rapid reporting of, and repair to, damaged dry rising mains;
- hard-wired smoke alarm systems are provided wherever possible; and
- there is planning to ensure that adequate numbers of firefighters and fire engines are mobilised to fires in high-rise buildings.

Touching on the Newquay fire, the General Secretary also told delegates of the dangers of cuts to equipment and staffing as well as to training – and appealed to Cornwall county councillors to reconsider their plans to slash fire cover.

"Our motion is about the safety of fire crews and the public. It's about making people safe in their homes," he said.

The FBU delegation (l to r): Michael Nicholas; Sharon Eames; Roddy Robertson; Matt Wrack; Tam McFarlane; Dona Feltham; and Mick Shaw



PICTURES: ANDREW WIARD

Call for action now on flood equipment

Tam McFarlane (below), FBU Executive Council member for the South West, praised the "magnificent" job performed by FBU members in the recent floods and called for investment in the appropriate equipment.



Speaking in support of motion 36 on climate change, he said FBU members had been working up to 70 hours at a time, wading up to their waists in sewage water in kit designed to fight fires.

"The fire and rescue service doesn't have the equipment to deal with flooding on this scale. There needs to be investment in equipment now. We need action now to tackle the very serious consequences of climate change today."

Highlight on RDS housing

The FBU swung behind calls for a campaign for more affordable housing as it highlighted the fact that public sector workers were increasingly priced out of the housing market.

Firefighters, said General Secretary Matt Wrack, had to travel further and further to their place of work, a situation that had a particularly negative affect on the retained service.

The FBU amended motion 44 by Unison by calling for a moratorium on further transfers or privatisations of public housing stock until public consultation on the government green paper *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable* is completed.

For more information on Congress 2007 visit: www.tuc.org.uk/congress

In brief

Trade unions need to do more to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade, said Michael Nicholas, FBU Executive Council Member for Black and Ethnic Minority Members. Speaking to the motion to TUC Congress originally moved by the FBU at the TUC Black Workers Conference, he said that an annual slavery remembrance day had widespread support. A space had already been acquired in London's Hyde Park and a permanent memorial commissioned, but the trade union movement should contribute towards the costs.



The TUC should be a "leader of best practice" in the provision of childcare for conferences and events it runs, the Union argued in a motion which was defeated by delegates. Dona Feltham, acting FBU Executive Council member for Women, condemned the TUC's failure to be this, despite the endorsement of this policy by the TUC Women's Conference. The motion said that: "inadequate, inappropriate or unaffordable childcare is a huge barrier to parents and carers and, in particular, to women's involvement in the trade union and labour movement."



Congress backed an FBU motion, presented by President Mick Shaw, calling on the UK to pursue a positive relationship with Venezuela and for building trade union links to underpin the advances for working people and the democratic renewal in the country. The FBU backed another international motion (defeated), from the RMT, which called for a referendum on the proposed EU Treaty and for a No vote. Congress instead backed calls for a referendum without a recommendation as to which way to vote and expressing concerns about privatisation and trade union rights.



FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack was re-elected to section C of the TUC General Council, with 376,000 votes.

A Devon ALP in action.
More than 400 people were
evacuated from their homes
during this plastics factory
blaze in Paignton



FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

Consultations" are all the rage in the fire service but sadly rather too many of them are just a sham. Take Devon and Somerset's 12-week consultation on its proposed cuts to frontline services and staffing. Staff, the public and even the MPs who approved the combination of both services were promised that this would not lead to frontline cuts.

Chief fire officer Paul Young wants to save £1 million. Among his proposals to achieve this is dual crewing of all aerial ladder platforms (ALPs), one of which is based at Torquay fire station.

This will mean that there will not be enough staff to operate full-time ALPs in Plymouth, Exeter, Barnstaple and Torquay. Crews will only be able to use the equipment if there are enough firefighters to staff it – so it will be a lottery whether or not an ALP can be used. Crews would have to leave a frontline vehicle during a fire to jump across and operate the "Bronto" leaving one less frontline fire appliance. If the Bronto was needed, a call would have to be put in to Exeter or Plymouth to get one or send a crew back to Torquay to get it. By any standards that is a cut in front line services.

Last month firefighters in Torbay held a meeting to discuss the brigade's proposals with members of the public, local MPs and councillors. At least 70 attended and the message from all but the sole councillor present (clearly doing his own personal consultation) was clear: No to chief Young's plans.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Over the consultation period some 11,500 people expressed outrage at the fact that, yet again, the council tax goes up, but local services from the council are cut.

Such was the brigade's enthusiasm for the consultation process that it sent a clerk to collect the petition forms delivered by the FBU to

DEVON & SOMERSET

**Staff, the public and
MPs who approved
the combination
were promised no
frontline cuts**

council headquarters, instead of the principal manager expected. Another calculated snub to the FBU no doubt, but what of the safety of the local community?

The tragic events in Newquay – where an ALP had to be driven 50 miles from Devon because Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service had none available and three members of the public lost their lives – ought to have clarified things for the doubters. Budget-driven cuts pushed through by fire services will cost lives. Nevertheless, staff have been told that the budget must be squared. But the budget won't be known by anyone until early December.

What we do know is that, since the start of the consultation period, services across the county have made enormous savings. The pay rise awarded to fire service staff was 0.6% under what Devon and Somerset had budgeted for. The Firebuy national procurement strategy has begun to produce promised savings. Almost £200,000 off insurance costs should also go a considerable way to maintaining front line appliances.

Nevertheless, firefighters and emergency fire control staff have been told that cuts are the only option and that these have to be made in the "real world". Well they know, from daily experience in the "real world", that large-scale fires can and do happen and that they pose a risk to lives. That's why they have been in the streets campaigning since May. They will do everything to stop this budget-driven madness.

After promises that there would be no frontline cuts as a result of the combination of the two fire authorities, staff of Devon and Somerset are already facing cuts in staffing levels and frontline services that the public receive.

This cannot be allowed to happen. For it will be the public in the two counties that, sooner or later, will pay the price with their lives.



Firefighters tackle a heath
fire on Exmoor

PICTURE: APEX NEWS AND PICTURES

Towards a 21st Century Fire Service

MATT WRACK, FBU GENERAL SECRETARY

“The UK fire and rescue service has been through a turbulent few years and enormous change. That's not something that employers often like to admit as they argue against decent pay and conditions in the Service. But it's a fact.

I joined the fire service in 1983. On my recruitment course we learned about the structure of the fire service. And that meant the 1947 Fire Services Act, a local service working to national standards. It meant the National Joint Council (NJC) and the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC). And it meant a pension scheme created about the same time.

In the past five years we have seen the whole pack of cards thrown up into the air. There is no area of the service which has not been affected by changes of some sort.

The 2002/2003 national strikes saw a breakdown in relations with employers and Government on many fronts. Since then there's been a new Fire and Rescue Services Act – replacing a very long-standing framework. Standards of fire cover have gone, replaced by integrated risk management planning (IRMP). The CFBAC has been abolished. So have the appointment and promotion regulations, and the discipline regulations.

Pensions for firefighters and control staff – the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) – have been amended and a New Firefighters' Pension Scheme created.

The rank-based system has gone and we now have roles that determine the jobs that we do under the Integrated Personal Development System. We are beginning to see multi-tier entry to the service.

We have seen attacks on, and changes to, shift and duty systems as fire and rescue authorities try to find new ways to save money. After the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement there is now much more local bargaining on many issues.

And as a result we've seen a big increase in local disputes and conflict. We have seen strikes in Suffolk, West Midlands, Hertfordshire and Merseyside in 2005 and 2006 – that is more strikes than at any time in our history. We have seen other campaigns and ballots without going to strike in Cleveland and Staffordshire. We have also seen numerous disputes and ballots for action short of strike – again at an unprecedented level.

Furthermore, looming over the entire service is the massively expensive and flawed plan to regionalise emergency fire control, which will have far-reaching negative consequences for public and firefighter safety.

Meanwhile FBU members – firefighters, officers, retained, wholetime, control – have been tested to your limits with new responsibilities, from working to build community cohesion to responding to the

consequences of climate change, global war and terrorism.

All these changes mean that as a Union we need to take stock. We need to consider how these changes affect us and what the Union needs to do to respond.

And in responding to them, we need to be conscious of where we are as a union. The transformation we have seen at least matches the changes that led to the creation of the post-war fire service. And it has happened in tougher circumstances. The Union emerged from World War Two in a very strong position to help shape the post-1947 service. The climate is now much less favourable to the trade unions.

This generation of FBU members has been through – and continues to go through – a huge period of turmoil and transformation. Many of our members have rightly found this frustrating and demoralising.

So we need to develop a strategy to take us forward in this period of great change. We need to try to understand what is going on, to try to make sense of it and to analyse where the fire service fits into wider public service 'reform', as politicians call it. Most importantly, we need to provide our own alternative.

In the past two years we have begun to turn the tide. After the 2003 settlement, many employers and chief fire officers (CFOs) thought they could do whatever they wanted – force through change and wheel out any madcap idea. But the resistance of members and officials at local level has helped to turn that tide. And members who stood firm in Suffolk, in West Midlands, in Hertfordshire and in Merseyside stand out for particular mention.

Five years ago, we also faced being frozen out on many fronts: by ministers, civil servants, employers and CFOs, while in many ways the NJC was not functioning after the dispute.

At a national level we have worked hard to turn that tide too. Indeed, the NJC is back meeting again regularly and the joint secretary system is re-established.

We have established communication again with the minister and team. We have set up a system of regular meetings with senior civil servants. We have made some progress with the employers and with a number of CFOs.

Those are achievements of which you can be proud – because the FBU is ensuring that it cannot be removed from the heart of the UK fire and rescue service.

We have been fighting back and fighting for our place at the table. It's not over by a long shot but we have made some progress.

It's time to have a debate on how to take this Union forward – and I would like to see all members take part in the process. It's your Union – together we will decide its future.





Firefighters are among the millions of people who are benefiting from the policies of the Venezuelan government led by Hugo Chávez

Hugo Chávez, the charismatic left-wing President of Venezuela has now been in power for nine years, after surviving a coup attempt, a bosses' lockout in the country's precious oil industry and winning another six-year term in the December 2006 presidential elections.

Both the coup and lockout, among other events, could have brought about his downfall, but the Chávez government's policies have used the country's oil wealth to provide health and education services to the poor majority, who turn out in droves to voice their support for Chávez and have, through 11 elections and referenda, voted to keep him in power.

Throughout this time, the Venezuelan fire

service has fought to remain a service for all the community. Plaza Venezuela Fire Station in the district of Libertador is one of 23 fire stations in the capital Caracas. Felipe Aranguren is 52 and has been a firefighter there for four of his 20 years in the service. He is in charge of rescue operations and we spoke to him days before the December 2006 presidential elections. He chatted about the station where he works and about the fire service in Venezuela.

"At Plaza Venezuela there are 46 fire-

**We can go to good schools
and to university which just
wasn't possible before**

fighters, some of whom float between other stations close by. All firefighters work 24 hours on (which includes recreation and rest), and 28 hours off," he says.

Felipe says women make up approximately 10% of the service. Are women recruits important? "Of course!" is his reply – firefighters are recruited across the class, gender and racial divide, he says.

Venezuela is divided into municipalities that are much like local councils in the UK. Each municipality has its own fire service controlled by the local council, the most senior person of which is an elected mayor.

With the presidential elections just around the corner, all anybody in Caracas was talking about was who they were going to vote for



Left: Plaza Venezuela fire station – the capital's firefighters are recruited across the class, gender and racial divide

Below: Chávez supporters rally in Caracas before the December 2006 presidential elections



and most people were either wearing red for Chávez or blue for Manuel Rosales, the main opposition candidate. Felipe was reluctant to reveal who he supported. "As a fire station it's very important that we are not identified with



Felipe Aranguren – in charge of rescue operations

any one side of the political divide – we have to serve the whole community. For that reason I don't want to reveal how I will vote".

His caution should not be dismissed lightly. The fire service has found itself in the middle of the conflict in the past. On 11 April 2002, Chávez was briefly removed from office in a coup organised by opposition politicians and disaffected military officers – plotters backed by the USA.

There were casualties that day and firefighters were on hand carrying out their duties impartially.

But over the two days in which the opposition gained power, firefighters found themselves in the middle of the political dispute. Plaza Venezuela fire station had to deal with the fact that the mayor of the area was an opposition politician. It is at this point Felipe hints at his political allegiance.

"We had to work in a very complicated environment, because the municipal government

was opposition anyway. We found ourselves affected by something (the overthrow of President Chávez) the great majority of us didn't agree with." Luckily the coup was short lived and Chávez was back in power on 13 April.

Several days after the election in the city of Maracay in Aragua State, Arturo Sanchez and Marina Paez are getting ready to head home after their 24-hour shift in a station in the south of the city. They are relatively new recruits having served 18 months and two years in the service respectively. Both are from working-class backgrounds and are not so reserved when asked about their choice in the election.

"We both voted for President Chávez," says Marina, "because he's transformed the country".

Arturo interrupts her to say that, where they live, they now have doctors, nurses and even dentists. "We can go to good schools and to university which just wasn't possible before," he says.

They are talking about the social missions – government-funded services that reach out to the poor. Mission Barrio Adentro ('Inside the Neighbourhood') is a health mission, while there are several other Missions, like Mission

Four unused buildings were expropriated in Caracas to house firefighters and their families

Ribas, which provides educational facilities. They are not merely 'top-down' services. The community is involved in decision-making bodies that decide how they are run. And this is the Bolivarian revolution – illiteracy has been almost wiped out in four years.

Both say that, despite being recent recruits, most of their colleagues believe the fire service had improved under the Chávez government. Felipe says the basic salary of a Venezuelan firefighter is one of the best in South America. In addition four unused buildings have been expropriated in Caracas to house firefighters and their families.

For Felipe the most important thing is that all Venezuelans can rely on their local fire service whenever they need it and that both rich and poor receive the same quality of service.

As it turned out, President Hugo Chávez won the election decisively, so although Felipe would not admit it, there's little doubt he's pleased that the Bolivarian revolution will continue.

→ For more info:

Venezuela Information Centre at www.vicuk.org or Hands Off Venezuela at www.handsoffvenezuela.org

PENSIONS

When on July 11 this year FBU member Martin Marrion, along with two other colleagues, was told by London Fire Brigade that their pensions were being cut off, it came as a complete shock.

Martin, 50, had been declared permanently unfit for firefighting duties and retired by the brigade on medical grounds 18 months earlier in January 2006. He had fought tooth and nail against this decision, but he was not to know that worse was to come.

His disability was caused by hearing loss from attending incidents in the course of his duties. These included an explosion at the Italian consulate in 1980, shortly after he joined the service. He was called out from Knightsbridge fire station and, while he was on a branch covering the building from outside, a manhole five yards away blew. He lost hearing for a week. While at Orpington fire station – where he served from 1982 until he retired – a regular task was putting out car

fires, sometimes as often as two a night. And when tyres get hot they nearly always explode – and did so very close to Martin's ears.

Not only did the brigade class his disability, which was degenerative, as less serious than it was, meaning that his pension payments would be lowered, but LFB's board of medical referees also subsequently decided that, while Martin and his colleagues were indeed unfit for operational firefighting, they were not unfit for performing "other duties appropriate to the role of firefighter" and thus should not have been retired in the first place.

Re-employment ruled out

FBU solicitors Thompsons launched a judicial review of this decision on the basis that the board of medical referees had overstepped its remit – which was only to assess the degree of disablement.

Martin, meanwhile, had contacted the brigade and asked if there were any desk jobs. He was told no. Re-employment was out of the question.

Then came the body blow. Letters from the brigade to Martin and his two colleagues stated that while the judicial review was being heard – a process of up to 12 months – their pension payments would be stopped as from August.

"I wanted to be a firefighter since I was six," says Martin. "I never wanted to do anything else. And I was a really good firefighter. I didn't want to go. I was forced to go. And now they are not even paying my pension. It's terrible."

"I'm 50 now. I took out a new mortgage two years ago. My plan was to retire at 55 and pay my mortgage off with my pension. I am in serious trouble now. I've already missed two payments on my mortgage."

Martin, devastated, was now without a penny and facing the possibility of having to sell his home. He again contacted the brigade to ask them not to stop the pension. The brigade refused. Martin asked if he could return to work in a non-operational capacity. Again, he was told no.

Martin and his two colleagues may be the first but are unlikely to be the last FBU

NO JOB NO PENSION NO MONEY



The pension rights of all firefighters are under threat as a result of government guidance on ill-health retirements. *Firefighter* spoke to one member denied a job and pension as a result

members to suffer such a fate unless action is taken now.

For thanks to an astonishing change in position by the government on amendments to the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS), it is now virtually impossible for any firefighter to receive an ill-health or injury pension – whether the disablement is due to fire service duties or otherwise.

In July 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced that it was amending the FPS, including its definition of a “regular firefighter”. During the subsequent consultation process, the amendment was presented – and fire authorities and the FBU are clear on this – as being designed to allow redeployment to other duties within the firefighter’s rank.

After the consultation ended, the ODPM confirmed in an explanatory note that the amendment was about a “change in the definition of firefighter allowing people to remain in the pension scheme if they undertake roles other than firefighting.”

On 28 July 2004, when a statutory instrument making the amendment was laid before parliament, and again sometime before the Firemen’s Pension Scheme (Amendment) Order 2004 came into force on 13 September 2004, this position was reaffirmed – to parliamentarians and fire service stakeholders. The ODPM stated that: “If the FRA cannot offer other employment, fitness to perform other duties would not be relevant and the person may be retired with an ill-health award.”

Complete change

Then on 4 September 2006 came a complete and highly significant change of position. The ODPM decided, in Fire Service Circular 11/2006, to amend guidance set out in previous circulars and memoranda to parliament, stating that this new guidance “more accurately reflects” the provisions of the FPS: “The test in assessing whether a regular firefighter ought to retire on the grounds that he is permanently disabled under Rule A15 is whether he is permanently disabled for

firefighting and for performing other duties appropriate to the role.”

Doug Christie of Thompsons, who have been advising the FBU on the issue, said: “On this basis, no member can receive an ill-health or injury pension unless they are so disabled that they can do none of the duties within their role map, whether a job restricted to those duties is provided or not.

“Given that duties within the role maps include wholly sedentary work, such as desk duties, a seriously disabled firefighter will be denied an ill health/injury pension because he or she can undertake desk duties which are not, in fact made available. Ill-health pensions, including injury awards for those injured on duty, will be very rarely available on this new test, if at all.”

Fast forward to 17 January 2007 and a Firefighters Pension Committee (FPC) meeting. The FBU challenged the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on Circular 11/2006. According to the minutes of the FPC, the Chairman, Martin



STEFANO CAGNONI

PENSIONS

Hill for DCLG, said: "that the guidance given in circular 11/2006 clarified DCLG's view of the pension scheme. It could not be an interpretation of the scheme. The decision of whether or not to retire a member on an ill-health pension remained with the FRA. The question of whether a member, who does not qualify for ill-health retirement, can be dismissed if no suitable job is available was an employment matter and not for the pension schemes."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said firefighters up and down the country, even if they are disabled on duty, now face being denied an ill health or injury pension.

"It is the government which is responsible for this situation but the government hid this from everybody before, during and after the changes to the pension scheme it had proposed were introduced.

"The ODPM/CLG has misled us and other fire service stakeholders. And it has misled parliament. Our members dedicate the best years of their lives to the fire and rescue service, sometimes at considerable cost to their health.

And, in return for this, they get stabbed in the back – and dumped in a legal no-man's land with no job, no pension and no money.

"It's an absolute disgrace. No-one should have to face such an ordeal – and we will be pressing ministers and are prepared to launch a ballot for industrial action to ensure the guidance is amended."

Simple change needed

Amending the guidance should be relatively simple. After all, the Local Government Pension Scheme only refuses a pension if the 'light job' is on the same grade and is 'available', meaning in practice that it is offered. And that, of course, was the position for the FPS until DCLG, without consultation, simply changed its own guidance.

Back in London, Martin and his two colleagues face a tough future. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to the capital's fire chief calling for the decision to be reversed. London regional secretary Joe McVeigh said the London Fire Brigade's

behaviour was an absolute disgrace. "These men served the public of London with distinction and now the brigade wants to force them into poverty, and I do not use the word lightly. However, this is not just a London issue. If this brigade gets away with this, they and other authorities will be doing it to everybody else."

Martin, meanwhile, has been left with no job, no pension and no money – he is not even able to claim social security benefits because his employment status is unclear.

"I phoned the DSS, they wanted to know whether I had retired, I said well, yes, but I wasn't getting a pension and I wasn't getting any income because I wasn't working either. They said they didn't have a tick box for that.

"It's the first time I can't provide for my family. I can't describe how I feel. This has affected me very badly and I know it has affected my two colleagues badly too. I don't think I'll recover from this. I didn't want to leave the job. It's just unfair."

But Martin hasn't given up. He is determined to see justice. And so is the Union.

TIMELINE

17 July 2003 Fire Service Circular 9/2003: The circular opens consultation on a number of amendments to the FPS among which is an amendment to the definition of 'regular firefighter' including one that was presented as being designed to allow redeployment to other duties within the firefighter's rank.

30 September 2003 Consultation ends.

Early 2004 Fire Service Circular 14/2004: ODPM response to the consultation is consistent with the 2003 consultation, with an explanatory note referring to the changes to the FPS as: "A change in the definition of firefighter allowing people to remain in the pension scheme if they undertake roles other than firefighting. At present, a firefighter no longer engaged in full operational duties is unable to remain in the scheme."

28 July 2004 Statutory instrument making the amendment laid before Parliament. The explanatory memorandum confirms, as previously, that it is to "broaden the definition of 'firefighter' to allow a firefighter, who is no longer fit enough to engage in operational duties, to remain in the FPS rather than be retired with an ill-health pension".

July/September 2004 Fire Service Circular 30/2004: "... the definition has been amended to allow a firefighter who subsequently becomes permanently disabled for firefighting while remaining fit for other related duties to continue as a member of the FPS ... If the FRA cannot offer other employment, fitness to perform other duties would not be relevant and the person may be retired with an ill-health award."

4 September 2006 Firefighters Pension Scheme Circular 11/2006: "... We have revised the guidance which we have been giving to fire and rescue authorities when asked about the consequences of the amendment. The test in assessing whether a regular firefighter ought to retire on the grounds that he is permanently disabled under Rule A15 is whether he is permanently disabled for firefighting and for performing other duties appropriate to the role."

17 January 2007 FBU challenges DCLG on Circular 11/2006 at the Firefighters Pension Committee. Chairman, Martin Hill for DCLG, responds that "... the guidance given in circular 11/2006 clarified



Martin Marrion surveys the sea of paper his case has created

STEFANO CAGNONI

DCLG's view of the pension scheme. It could not be an interpretation of the scheme. The decision of whether or not to retire a member on an ill-health pension remained with the FRA. The question of whether a member, who does not qualify for ill-health retirement, can be dismissed if no suitable job is available was an employment matter and not for the pension schemes."

July 11 2007 Martin Marrion, along with two other colleagues, receive letters telling them their pension is to be stopped as from August 2007.

27 July 2007 FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack writes to London Commissioner Ken Knight Calling for him to reverse the decision to stop the pensions of three FBU members in London.

Don't give up your rights

Whether it is firefighting, rope rescue, water rescue, community fire safety, urban search and rescue or crewing new-type mini-appliances, uniformed staff are carrying out a whole range of additional activities outside their primary contract of employment. And they are not being properly informed of the implications – indeed in some cases they are being actively misled. The truth is that firefighters and emergency fire control staff face the loss of significant pension and compensation rights.

John Lord from Cheshire (who retired in September), was one of a number of firefighters who considered the possibility of crewing ‘targeted response vehicles’ between 3pm and 10pm in Chester as a volunteer under a secondary contract that was being advertised by the brigade. No health warning came with the offer.

He says: “I had health and safety concerns – highlighted by the FBU – of staffing these cut-down firefighting appliances. But I was also worried, as I was approaching retirement, that doing so under a secondary contract would compromise the award for any injury pension.

“Had I been injured while working the second contract, my pension would have been based on the time I had been on that contract and under the new pension scheme which was introduced only in April 2006 – instead of the Firefighters Pension Scheme for which I had built up 32 years of contributions.

“I dismissed the option to earn more money in the short term because in the long term I would have lost money if I had had an accident.”

Following the FBU’s move to register a dispute on the issue, and with the National Joint Council joint secretaries at the point of getting involved, the brigade decided to mothball secondary contracts.

Cheshire FBU brigade chair Andy Price said: “By pulling their plans for secondary contracts at the point that they did, we believe the brigade recognised that they were not legitimate under our national conditions of service – the Grey Book – and that the pension implications could not be addressed in the secondary contract.”

In neighbouring Merseyside the FBU has also mounted a campaign to counter misinformation spread by senior managers, and firefighters are wising up to the problems of secondary contracts.

Brigade secretary Les Skarratts said some firefighters have been working 96 hours a week on low level of activity and risk (LLAR) shifts – half of the hours on secondary contracts.

“In the main, the people who find this attractive are firefighters in the latter part of their career,” he said. “They are hoping to accrue greater pension benefits. For example, a firefighter might be hoping to finish their career on a manager’s income. That’s not how it works though.

“You’ll have 30 years in the FPS but only one year on the other contract. You are a first-year firefighter in effect.

‘Little or no pension benefit’

“There is little or no benefit as regards your pension. A lot of people who were sold this lie are now realising that work on secondary contracts is not as attractive as they once thought it was. There is a lot of disgruntlement. They are now reconsidering the work they are doing on secondary contracts.

“Chief fire officer Tony McGuirk recognised that there was a problem but, rather than adopt a common sense approach, he is ignoring it.

“He wrote to firefighters working secondary contracts saying he was setting up a system of additional compensation payments out of the fire authority’s own resources.”

But as the Union has pointed out, guaranteeing to make up any injury award either by taking out insurance or by guaranteeing to do so is “ultra vires” (beyond the power of fire authorities), as stated by Government in a recent pensions circular (FPSC 6/2007 – see extract, above, left). In short, it

is unlawful. So the guarantee is misleading and worthless. “Our members should not rely upon them,” says Les.

Nationally, the Union has moved to ensure that FBU members get the truth about the downside of secondary contracts and has called on CFOA and the three chief officers’ associations in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, to ensure senior managers do not “misinform” staff on the issue.

→ More general information at www.fbu.org.uk

→ Members who may be affected by secondary contracts are urged to contact local FBU officials, who are in the best position to provide advice.

WHAT DOES A FORENSIC SCIENTIST DO?

Sarah Griffith is a senior forensic scientist in South London. Her job starts when firefighters have left a fire-ravaged building and brigade investigators or police believe the blaze could be suspicious. And it's certainly not a nine-to-five job

When Sarah Griffith is called out to a suspect blaze in the middle of the night, she knows she could end up giving forensic evidence in court months or even years later. For the Forensic Science Service, evidence continuity – with highly trained staff seeing a case through from start to finish – is part of the job spec. It is seen as the best way to help the criminal justice system establish what really happened on that night, in that building – or what's left of it.

"We act on behalf of the police, attending scenes of fires to look at the remaining physical evidence in a completely forensic light," says Sarah. Evidence is then analysed back in the labs. "From that point, we work out whether or not a crime has been committed. If the evidence suggests one has, then we discuss with the police the best forensic strategy to take the case forward." And if the case goes to court, Sarah, as one of the senior team scientists, will present the forensic evidence.

Forensics is a specialised form of detection, and, for Sarah, fire investigation is "a bit like archaeology" – evidence from the fire scene must be treated with great care to yield its secrets. "As a building burns and a fire develops, the heat and flames obviously have an impact on the structure and the furniture. As the heat increases in the room, you'll get plaster spalling off the walls and sometimes joists will come down from the roof above. Meticulous removal of those layers and careful examination of what's in each layer will give you a timeline of events in the room."

With 21 years experience with the Forensic Science



Sarah Griffith at work in her Lambeth, South London, laboratory

Working For You



JOHN DRAKE

Regional Official

South West

The FBU campaign to stop the slashing of fire cover in Kernow continues. The headlines have been about the downgrading from 24-hour shift to day-crewed. So what is the FBU doing about retained duty system (RDS) issues? Proposals by the Lib Dems on Cornwall County Council impact on all duty systems, on all roles, on the entire service and all communities in Cornwall.

The majority of firefighters in Cornwall work the RDS and a significant number are FBU members. Councillors supporting the cuts praise RDS firefighters in the press and council meetings.

They say "Retained firefighters do a magnificent job in Cornwall". The FBU has echoed this sentiment but then been extremely critical of the county council for: failing RDS firefighters by not recruiting extra firefighters to cover the annual leave that RDS members have been entitled to for over five years; failing to recruit extra RDS firefighters to cover the two days off won for RDS members by the FBU; failing to act on

The hypocrisy has staggered the communities of Cornwall and cannot be left unchallenged

the review of RDS in Cornwall that has been sitting on a council shelf for three years; and failing to invest in training, equipment and, most importantly, people working the RDS.

The hypocrisy of the leaders of a council that is wasting public money on a scale that has staggered the communities of Cornwall cannot be left unchallenged. The FBU has once again been the only fire service union to challenge the political leaders of the service and to fight for firefighters and control staff regardless of duty system.

Local representatives have been touring all stations and watches over the last nine months to inform and seek the views of all our members and this vital work will continue.

We will not let the RDS be seen as the poor relation in the fire service. We will continue to fight for an increase in funding, establishment and training for the RDS. This may just stop the cowardly politicians using RDS firefighters as a political football.

The question for non-FBU members is ... Why haven't you joined the only Union in the country that is fighting for you.

PICTURES: STEFANO CAGNONI

Service – 15 of those spent specialising in fire investigation – and a chemistry degree under her belt, Sarah has been trained to "think forensically outside the laboratory".

And to the trained eye of a forensic scientist, even the smallest objects from a fire scene have the potential to yield those vital clues as to how the fire started, and even who set it. Collecting and analysing such fragments can provide hard forensic evidence for court proceedings.

"Even when a building is nearly burnt to the ground and has had enormous volumes of water wash through it, it's surprising how much is left and what you can interpret from it. There's always something. That's my experience."

As the Forensic Science Service deals with criminal justice work, Sarah says she obviously sees a "skewed sample" of the fires firefighters are called out to tackle. "Aggravated arson is at the extreme end of the criminal damage spectrum and can carry a life sentence; you have to consider whether someone was reckless with regard to endangerment of other people, or whether they intended to endanger others when they set the fire. In the majority of cases, we are dealing with deliberate fire-setting where

'Preserving evidence won't seem an immediate priority for frontline firefighters, but time and again, crews manage to pull it off'

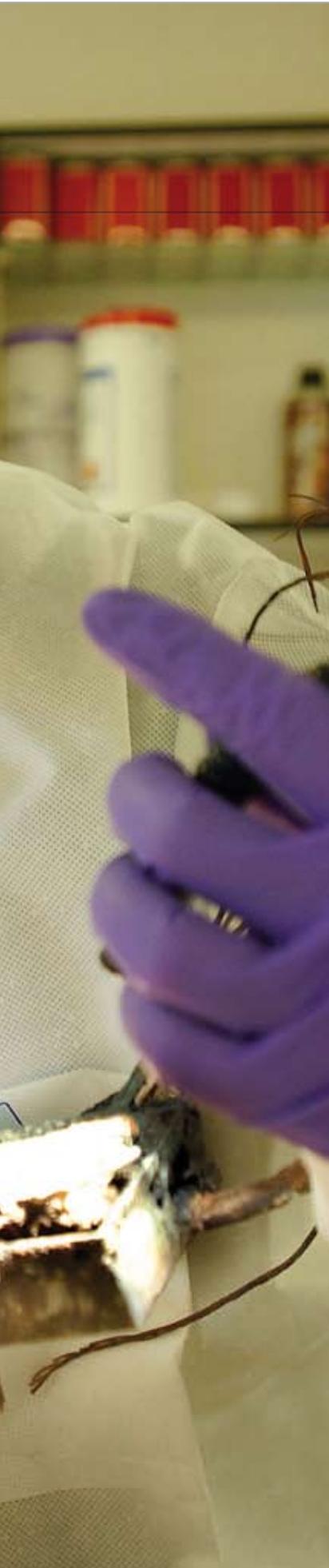
there has been no loss of life and you're looking at reckless versus intent charges on behalf of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service."

Setting a fire to give someone a scare just isn't a realistic option, says Sarah, and can go horribly wrong very quickly. "An old-fashioned sofa in an enclosed room can kick out the equivalent of 4,000 one kilowatt bar heaters at full involvement." And a fire of that intensity delivers damage way beyond the "scare" the fire-setter intended.

She believes fire crews have become much more "alive to the idea of preserving evidence" over recent years. The days of putting the entire contents of a fire-ravaged room out on the pavement are long gone. "I appreciate what a difficult job it must be to try to contain a fire. Preserving evidence won't seem an immediate priority for frontline firefighters intent on rescuing people and minimising damage, but time and again, crews manage to pull it off – which is very impressive and helps enormously when we get to the fire scene".

Forensic tools have evolved considerably over the past five years, Sarah says. Take GCMS – Gas Chromatography Mass Spectroscopy – which can now confirm the individual components of flammable liquids used to set the fire. Sometimes additives can also be detected which can help to identify the source of the liquid and comparisons with any liquids found in the possession of suspects may be possible.

Sarah finds working as a forensic scientist challenging, stimulating and intellectually rigorous. Along with colleagues at the Forensic Science Service, she is using her skills to help catch arsonists – thereby playing an important role in boosting fire safety. Forensic science is an increasingly popular career choice for both sexes, and competition for jobs is intense. In the unit Sarah works in at Lambeth, women now outnumber men.



Beating the blues

At least one in six of us will become depressed at some time during our life

DEPRESSION

Now winter is on the way, many of us may experience a sense of low spirits as the days get shorter. But when feelings of sadness don't pass and begin to interfere with everyday life, this may well point to depression. At least one in six of us will become depressed during our life, so even if we do not experience it, it's likely that a family member or close friend will. For that reason, it's important to recognise the symptoms, understand the causes and know how to tackle it.

Depression shows up in different ways; sometimes the symptoms may appear to be physical and mask the underlying condition. Physical signs may include tiredness and lack of energy, sleep problems (too much or too little), weight change, aches and pains and loss of libido. Emotionally, one might feel more easily upset, pessimistic or irritated and experience a lack of enjoyment of life. While dramatic symptoms, such as suicidal thoughts and self-harming, can point to severe depression, mild depression may simply be marked by a general sense of

KEY HELP POINTS:

- antidepressants, especially for severe depression
- 'talking therapies' like self-help groups, counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy
- getting active – regular exercise can be effective for mild or moderate depression.

numbness and distance from friends.

The causes of depression vary from person to person. It is often triggered by a stressful event, such as experiencing bereavement, witnessing a traumatic incident or changes in situation like retirement. Excessive consumption of drugs like alcohol, cannabis or cocaine can also contribute.

Chemical changes in the brain may bring on depression, especially in women after childbirth. Those with a family history of depression are more likely to experience the condition, although it does not appear to be inherited. It is likely that a combination of several causes can lead to depression, although there may be no obvious cause.

It is crucial to break the hold of the

condition, because it tends to feed itself – it's easy to get more depressed about being depressed.

There are many positive ways to deal with depression and treatment programmes can be highly effective. Anti-depressants are often helpful especially for severe depression. They affect chemical messengers in the brain in order to lift the mood of the person. Although often helpful in alleviating the symptoms of depression, they do not work for everyone and, like all drugs, can have unpleasant side effects.

There is a range of 'talking therapies' like self-help groups, counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy (which tackles negative thought processes) that have proven success.

One great way to tackle it is by getting active; studies have shown that regular exercise can be as effective as anti-depressants in cases of mild or moderate depression. Research released earlier this year by Mind, the leading mental health charity in England and Wales, revealed that so-called ecotherapy (being active outdoors) is particularly effective, so going for a walk in the park or doing a spot of gardening can work wonders!

Mind provides free information on depression and other mental health issues, as well as supporting a network of local Mind associations. We also campaign to tackle the discrimination people with mental health issues face and for the availability of better mental health services. One such campaign is 'We Need to Talk'. It calls for talking therapies to receive better government funding and to be more widely available through the NHS, particularly for those experiencing depression.

Mind is an independent charity and depends entirely on donations to continue its work.

If you would like to support Mind please visit our website.

→ Find out more at www.mind.org.uk
Call MindInfoLine: 08457 660163 (Monday to Friday 9.15am to 5.15pm) for information on all aspects of mental ill health

Sources of help in the local area: with a network of over 200 affiliated local Mind associations, the organisation also provides services such as counselling, self-help groups and information provisions across England and Wales. Find out where your nearest local Mind Association is at www.mind.org.uk

ANTHONY BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY



Regular exercise can be as effective as anti-depressants in cases of mild or moderate depression and being active outdoors is particularly effective

Time off and FBU schools

Q How much notice do I have to give my watch manager to get paid time off to go to an FBU training course or school? And how much time off am I entitled to?

A It depends on the circumstances. Elected union officials have the right to reasonable time off for trade union duties and for training relevant to those duties. What is reasonable depends on the facts of each case. As much notice as possible should be given for any courses the official wants to attend. For health and safety activities, an employer must provide time off with pay during the employee's working hours "as shall be necessary for the purpose of undergoing such training in aspects of those functions as may be reasonable in all the circumstances". So the duty of an employer to provide time off for a health and safety official is more pressing than for a trade union official.

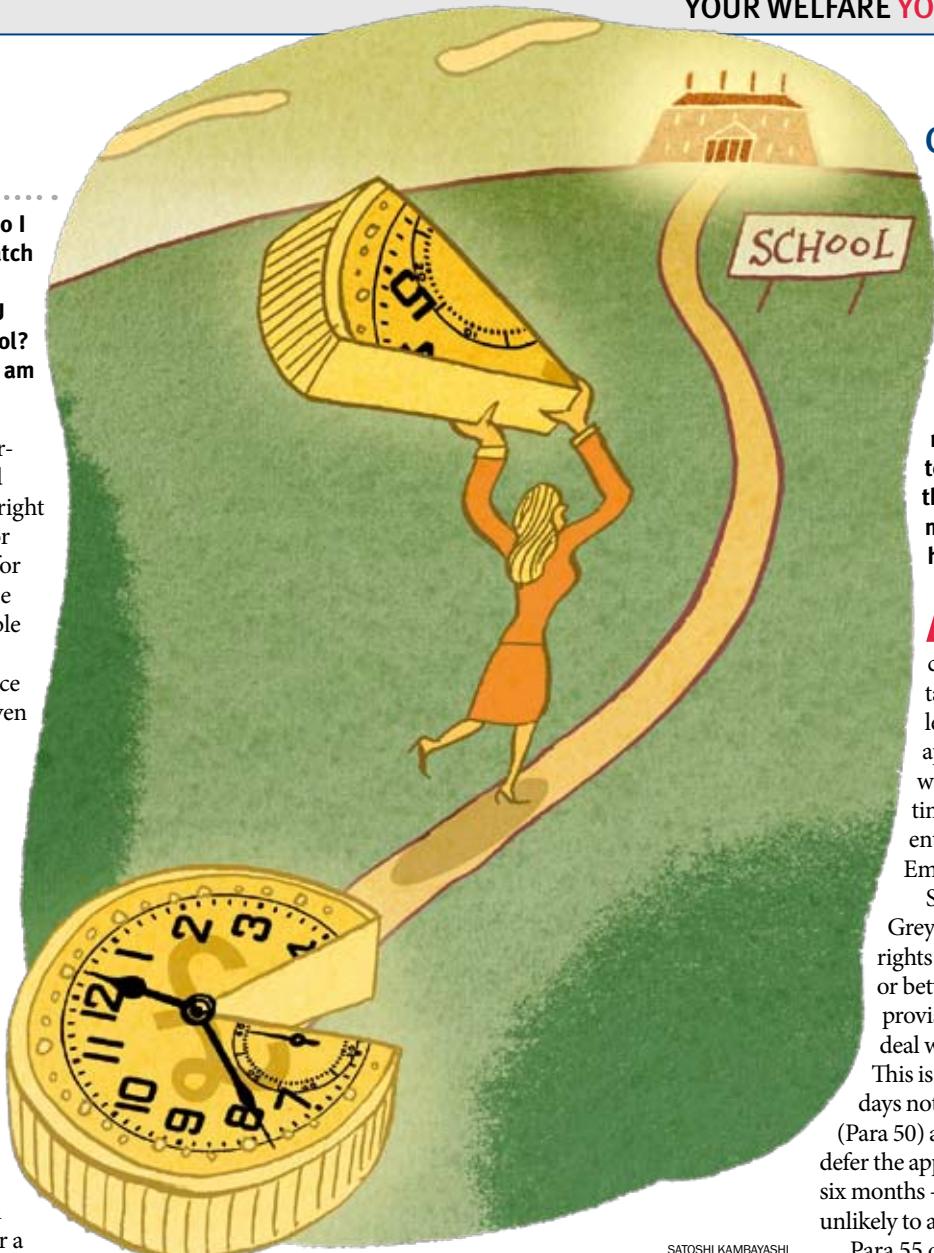
Guidance on time off is in the ACAS Code of Practice 3: Time off for trade union duties and activities and in the Health and Safety Commission Code of Practice: Time off for the training of Safety Representatives (1978). Both are available from their respective websites.

www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/hsc/
www.acas.org.uk/

Time limits and claims

Q I want to make a claim against my brigade but the incident happened several years ago. Can I do this?

A The law places strict time limits on both employment rights and personal injury cases.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Childcare emergency

Q The childminder of my three-year-old girl has fallen ill and no substitute can be found immediately so I need to take time off to look after her. Will the brigade make me use my normal holiday leave?

A Time off in relation to dependent children may be taken as parental leave, through an application for flexible working or under the time off for dependents provisions of the Employment Rights Act. Section 4 D of the Grey Book contains rights which are equal to or better than the statutory provisions. Paras 49 to 54 deal with parental leave. This is unpaid. At least 21 days notice must be given (Para 50) and the brigade may defer the application for up to six months – so parental leave is unlikely to assist here.

Para 55 deals with the right to request flexible working. An application must be made and the timescales involved probably mean that this right is not going to assist in these circumstances.

You have a right to a "reasonable amount of unpaid time off" for dependents (paras 56 to 59). What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances but is likely to be only a matter of days, rather than weeks or months. So you may well need to use some of your annual leave to sort out the problem.

www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/resources/greybook/grey_bookview.php?id=20

Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

In employment rights cases, such as unfair dismissal, discrimination or contractual disputes, the claim must be lodged within three months of the incident complained of.

For personal injury cases, your claim needs to be made within three years of your accident or the diagnosis of a work-related disease.

The earlier you make the claim the better as medical and witness evidence can go cold very quickly. And the stronger

and fresher the evidence, the more likely is a successful claim.

For employment rights cases, you should first contact a local FBU rep if you are in any doubt about whether you can pursue a case.

They will be able to offer advice, guidance and support.

If you have been injured at or away from work you can get advice on whether you can pursue a personal injury claim via the FBU's legal assistance network on 0808 100 6061.

'It's such a joy to drive – a completely different experience'

Tania Morris is a retained firefighter based at Colwyn Bay station in North Wales. She knows a thing or two about classic cars – and, with her husband Dave, now owns four of them. And they don't just sit in the garage

Fellow crew members at Colwyn Bay station are never quite sure what car Tania Morris will be turning up in when she arrives for work. Usually, it's her daily run-a-round – a green Ford Puma. But on occasion she'll turn up at the station in a fetching grey 1957 Baby Austin. And Tania doesn't take offence when colleagues come out with remarks such as "Oh my God – here comes Noddy" – as they did when she turned up for her first shout. "They get used to it," she says. "We've all got our hobbies. And mine's classic cars."

Tania is very fond of her baby Austin – an A35. "I try to run it all through the year on short journeys if I can. There's no heater, no mod cons, it gets freezing in winter and if you need to demist, you have to wind down the window by hand. But it's such a joy to drive – a completely different experience to driving modern cars."

If Tania is feeling really flash, she could choose to drive to work in her 1987 Jaguar XJS with a 5.3 litre V12 engine, complete with all-leather inner trim, heated seats, air conditioning and electric windows – considered state-of-the-art luxury nearly 20 years ago. "I don't take it out very often but I really love it. It's a grey-gold colour and I've always wanted one since I was a 16-year-old art student. I drive it about 200 miles a year when the weather's good. It only does about eight miles a gallon round town."

For Tania and her policeman husband Dave classic cars are there to be taken out for a spin, not locked up in the garage all year round, or the two double garages next door to the Morris family home to be more precise. As Tania puts it: "What's the point of having classic cars if





Tania Morris in one of her Morris Minors with her baby Austin in the background and, below, in her Jaguar XJS

PICTURES PAUL BOYD
'I don't think we've got the space to have more – but if something comes along, you never know'

you never take them out on the road?"

The couple's classic mini-fleet is completed by two black Morris Minors from the late fifties – a 1957 four-door with just 19,000 on the clock which had been in store for 30 years and a two-door built a couple of years later.

The collection, with its Jaguars and Morris Minors, can make some older people quite nostalgic for the days before the British car industry collapsed when most cars were designed and made in Britain by British-owned companies. When Tania takes her baby Austin to town, dewy-eyed pensioners have been known to confide "I used to have one of those" as she's parking up. "It jogs people's memories so they stop and have a chat. Which is nice," says Tania.

Smitten at a formative age

Dave was the main enthusiast for classic cars when the couple first met – Tania may have been smitten by the Jaguar XJS at a formative age, but before she met her husband-to-be that was as far as it went. "When we got married Dave sort of inflicted them on me. But now I'm the one who says we can't sell any. We had the chance of getting a classic E-type jag a couple of years ago. But he said we could only get it if I agreed to sell the XJS. So that just wasn't going to happen." When Tania got her XJS, Dave's Austin Cambridge had to go to make room for it.

The distinctly non-classic seven-seater Chrysler Voyager is the "family" motor – Austins Jags and Morris Minors may look good and drive beautifully, but they are not ideal for powering two parents, three teenage sons and a caravan on holiday abroad.

Tania and Dave are regulars at classic car shows and browse what's on sale at the "auto jumbles," which are a key component of the car show experience. Popping down to KwikFit is not really an option if your Morris Minor is 50 years old and you're after a replacement steering wheel. "We've got steering wheels, doors, door handles, lights – all sorts of parts over the years," says Tania. "It's good to meet other classic car fanatics and swap information with people who've got the same cars. You can enter your cars in competitions, but we haven't bothered. It's just fun to be there."

Are there any plans to expand the classic fleet or trade one in for a different model?

"I don't think we've got the space to have more – but if something comes along, you never know, we might be open to offers," says Tania. But flogging off the much-loved Jaguar XJS will not, one suspects, be an option ...

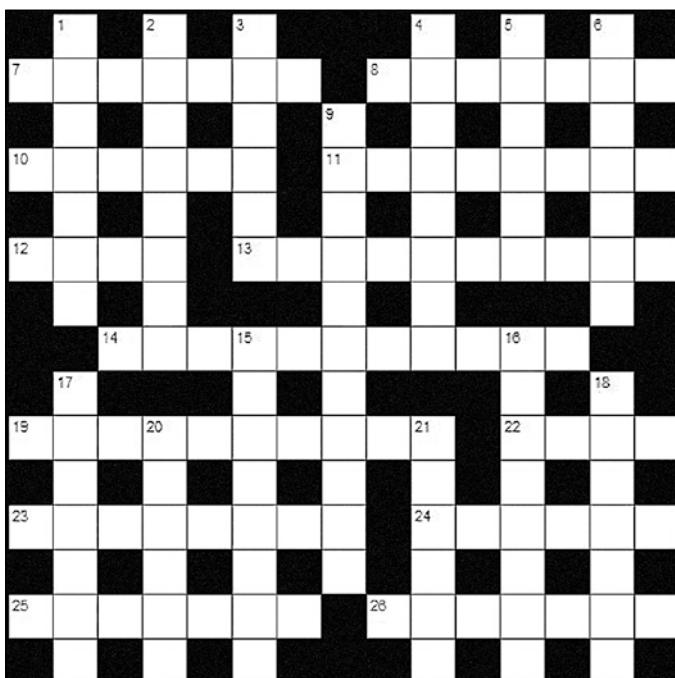
→ www.classicmotor.co.uk
www.mmoc.org.uk
www.jaguardriver.co.uk



TANIA MORRIS

Tania Morris, a retained duty system firefighter at Colwyn Bay in North Wales, gets eight miles a gallon from her 1987 Jaguar XJS. Just as well she uses a her 'baby Austin' A35 if she wants to travel to work in one of her mini-fleet of classic cars

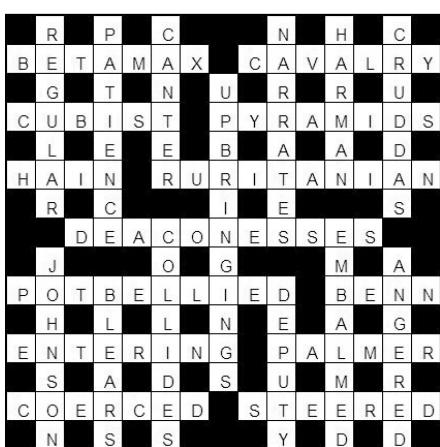
Quick Crossword

**ACROSS**

- 7** Test of fitness (for work?) (7)
- 8** Places of slot machines or shops (7)
- 10** Place to park your boat (6)
- 11** Player of keyboard instrument (8)
- 12** Small group, religious or political (4)
- 13** Unable to read or write (10)
- 14,23** Gathering of unions, held in 4 this year (6,5,8)
- 19** Products used to neutralise body odours (10)
- 22** Former US Vice President Al (4)
- 23** See 14 (8)
- 24** The BBC, affectionately (6)
- 25** Went back on (7)
- 26** The first M in MMR (7)

DOWN

- 1** Rotted (7)
- 2** Member of government or clergy (8)
- 3** Spicy sausage (6)
- 4** South-coast city, host of 14, 23 in recent years (8)
- 5** Carried on demonstrations (6)
- 6** One-roomed dwellings (7)
- 9** Describing hot-headed, unthinking or rash act (11)
- 15** Became less light, or clouded over (8)
- 16** Put in good order; build the union (8)
- 17** Reduced in rank (7)
- 18** Battered, bashed, tenderised (7)
- 20** Small bladed weapon (6)
- 21** Weighing instruments, or cladding for fish (6)



Solution
to August/
September
crossword



TIM WHITBY/ZUMA PHOTOS

5

Prize Quiz

Win a Philips 15-inch HD-ready LCD television

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
This issue the theme is art.

1. Name the painting of a Florentine woman by Leonardo da Vinci, which hangs in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, also known as La Gioconda or La Joconde.

2. Name the famous Dutch artist who severed his ear and whose painting, the 'Portrait of Dr Gauchet', is one of the most expensive paintings ever to be sold at auction (\$82 million in 1990).



3

3. Name the daddy of 'pop-art' – an American artist, who rose to fame in the 60s and who turned Campbell's Soup into an artwork.



4

4. Name the famous Spanish painter and sculptor born in Malaga in October 1881, whose works include 'Guernica' (1937).



5. Name the British creator of this picture, (known as the 'painter of light') who has a contemporary art award named after him.

6. Which renaissance artist painted the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican?

HOW TO ENTER

To win the Philips LCD television send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 October on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2007), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



Winner of the
July quiz:
Barry Graham
of Tyne and Wear



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Airwavespeak



You really can't make it up. There is something called "Airwavespeak" with its own Airwavespeak Working Group chaired by a John Blakeman.

This new language arose from the roll out of the Airwave digital radio system for the police. That's the same Airwave coming to the fire service through the FireLink Project.

Mr Blakeman wrote to Personnel Today (the publication for human resources, the pond life of the human race) to explain that Airwavespeak was created because: "Following the introduction of the Airwave digital radio system, it was quickly apparent that the increased voice quality did not encourage accuracy, clarity, brevity and discipline in police radio communications. The recognition that a national standard of police voice communications was needed led to the National Policing Improvement Agency forming the Airwavespeak Project."

This project "worked with linguistic experts from Cambridge University, and they examined regional police radio procedures." It must have been hard work and many meetings but police service "Airwave users can now communicate at local, cross-border and national level in a professional manner with radio standards that are consistent and concise."

Mr Blakeman who illustrates the point about clarity and consistency by re-assuring us that "the phrase 'Yes, Yes' is nationally recognised and the group was keen to retain good practice".

I can't tell you any more. **Mr Blakeman does not explain what the police officers are doing when their control hear the exclamation 'yes, yes' gasped across the airwaves.**

Rumours that CLOG are working on an Airwavespeak Project for the fire service can be quickly dismissed. The team are still working on Prescottspeak and the meaning of 'yes, yes Tracey'.

Reclining fast



And so the GMC three have seen some common sense at last. GMC furniture police accused the three of resting on the floor using sleeping bags rather than on new "reclining chairs" using aircraft-style lightweight

blankets. All three were disciplined and came close to being sacked. One received a final written warning and two received written warnings.

On appeal, GMC chief officer Barry Dixon reduced the punishments to written warnings over a reduced period of time, and one disciplinary was dismissed altogether.

The media row that broke row on news of the first disciplinaries thrust Anita Wainwright, the new GMC head of HR into spotlight. Station Cat can only assume Ms Wainwright slipped through the normally safe fingers of the GMC press office. HR people must not be allowed out on their own. This was demonstrated when Ms Wainwright came out with the statement that: **"Risk-assessed facilities have been provided for rest only, not sleep. However, if a firefighter were to doze off on the rest facilities provided, a commonsense approach is adopted."**

There was nothing commonsense about the approach and it nearly led to spontaneous walkouts even before a strike ballot was mentioned. Dealing with the appeals, Mr Dixon said there were 'issues regarding the implementation and enforcement' of the policy regarding the recliners.

He recognised "that there are issues regarding the implementation and enforcement of the policy that not only affect these individuals but employees across the service. Recognising that clarity regarding the policy may be needed in some areas, comprehensive internal guidance will be issued shortly."

Hopefully such guidance will be shorter than the current guidance on how to use the chairs. It runs to more pages than the guidance on how to use aerials.

Senior out of service?



Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is advertising for a new "Chief Executive" at the very reasonable salary of £142,000. The vacancy arises from April 2008 when Alan Doig retires after 32 years in the fire service.

The job advert says the post involves "leadership of a premier fire and rescue service" and that Staffs "require an exceptional applicant with the appropriate

commitment, energy and dynamism to join us in our drive for excellence". It goes on: "Applicants must have the necessary vision, leadership and management competencies to lead the fire and rescue service into a new era of advanced cooperation and productivity with other government and community stakeholders." And the brigade welcomes applications from across the public and private sectors.

No mention in the advert about managing at a senior level in the fire service. I can't seem to spot anything about the need to have demonstrated the ability to be able to step in quickly at Gold Command level and assist the response to major incidents.

Is this going to be another of those fire service jobs which goes "out of service" to an applicant with no fire service experience? Another one where those currently in senior positions are basically told they can't make the grade of chief officer?

On the bright side, at this rate we'll be able to wrap CFOA up in a few years.

Northern shock



I've solved the problem of fire service funding. Northern Rock Cat tells me the easiest way to get money out of the Government is to form long queues outside their offices.

The Government – which says it has no money – will simply panic and throw £10 billion at the problem. The key is not to talk about cash crisis but to use the term "temporary liquidity problem" needing the injection of £10 billion of "liquidity" (that means money) into the "money markets".

I got the idea from the comments of Michael Fallon MP during the Treasury Select committee grilling of Sir John Gieve, the Bank of England's Deputy Governor. Mr Fallon told him the Bank's version of events was: **"a bit like the fireman turning up at your door and saying the fire engine doesn't work".**

Well, sometime that might happen Mr Fallon, especially if it's one of Mr McGuirk's small fire vehicles. Better hope it's not at your house.

Start forming disorderly queues now. Let's demand our £10 billion.



25-year badges



David Sherman (r) Blue Watch Coalville Leicestershire, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep John Webster



Kevin Shirley (r), Alfreton, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from Brigade Secretary Mark Ferron



Dave Plumridge [l] Red Watch, Station 2, Wokingham Road station, Reading, receives his 25-year badge from Southern Regional Treasurer Dave Dymond



Chris Crooks (r) receives his 25-year badge from Headquarters Officers Rep Shane Halpin, Region 10 London



Crew manager Ray Gore (l), Blue watch W55, Orsett, receives his 25 year badge from Essex Branch Secretary Tony Benham



Frank Talbot-Jones (r) Blue Watch Coalville Leicestershire, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep John Webster



Barry Hutton (r) Red Watch, Huddersfield fire station receives his 25-year badge from Sean Starbuck, Region 4 EC member



Simon Ireland (c) West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire receives his 25 year badge from Dave Limer (l), Secretary Region 6, and Phil Coates, Brigade Chair



Paul Fenton (l) and **Neil Jenkins (r)** Sketty fire station, Mid & West Wales, receive their 25-year badges from Membership Secretary Chris Howells

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Mark Sharman (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officer's Secretary



Jim Donovan (r) receives his 25-year badge from Officers rep Barry Oakes, Region 10 London

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
01rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 N. Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
02rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham,
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
03rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
04rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire,
Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
05rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire,
Lincolnshire, Leicestershire,
Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
06gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire,
Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195 1/2 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
07rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North
Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5LJ
01656 867910
08rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire,
Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**

28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL

01376 521521

09rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**

John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB

020 7359 3638

london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**

Fire Station, Coldharbour Road,
Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT

01474 320473

11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire,
Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**

The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon,
Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**

158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE

0117 935 5132

13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership
Secretary of any change of address and
Head Office of changes to next of kin or
nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for
personal injury, family law, wills,
conveyancing, personal finance
and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-
related queries contact your local
FBU representative.

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